

# “Transformation”

Psalm 36:5-10, John 2:1-11, John 3:16-17 & John 4:14

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**Prayer for Understanding** Ever present Lord, we thank you for your word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Holy Spirit please open our eyes to the signs of your presence, open our ears to your voice and open our minds to your wisdom. Amen.

The psalmist sings of God’s transforming love. Love that is steadfast, unfailing, transforming every wrong into righteousness, transforming every discrimination into justice. God’s glorious love saves people and animals. God’s spectacular love provides an abundance of blessings. God is the fountain of life who invites us to drink from God’s ever flowing, pure river of delights. The psalmist sings: **Psalm 36:5-10 NLT “Your unfailing love, O Lord, is as vast as the heavens; your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the ocean depths. You save people and animals alike, O Lord. How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All humanity finds shelter in the shadow of your wings. You feed them from the abundance of your own house, letting them drink from your river of delights. For you are the fountain of life, the light by which we see. Pour out your unfailing love on those who love you; give justice to those with honest hearts.**

The gospel of John is a collection of transformation accounts. Are you celebrating Jesus’ transforming grace? John proclaims: **John 2:1-11 NRSV “On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. Jesus said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed God’s glory; and his disciples believed in Jesus.”**

The gospel of John abounds with symbolism, metaphors, and insights. John’s accounts have numerous levels of insights, layers of inspirations, and facets of transforming invitations.

Often, we read the first chapter of John on Christmas Eve. Jesus, the Word, Logos, connected with all people when it was written. For the Jews, Logos is the Word of God that created the cosmos. For everyone, Logos was the philosophy and wisdom of that time. So, no matter how you think about the beginning, John wants you to know that God’s love was the creative force that set the cosmos in motion, sustains the cosmos today, and will transform the cosmos to glorious perfection, allowing the cosmos to reveal God’s steadfast, unfailing love forever. The Word, Logos, Jesus became flesh to transform us, save us, complete us, perfect us, resurrect us.

The Word, Logos, also is revealing God’s desire to speak and listen to every one of us. God speaks and listens through every facet of the cosmos and through every person. For John darkness is fear, hate, and division. Light is love, joy, peace, grace, goodness. The Logos is the life force behind the light, the light shines in the darkness. The darkness will never overcome the light. The light will disperse the darkness, which is every fear, hate, and division.

Our scripture today begins with “On the third day.” Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. This is a form of an Easter account, a way that God is transforming every form of death to everlasting life. The third day also symbolizes the completion of creation, the fulfilment of God’s promises, and the manifestation of God’s plan.

Our transformation account happens at a wedding where two people become one to create a third. Weddings celebrate love, unity, and family. A wedding where Mary, the mother of Jesus, is present, the father being God, expresses humanity’s relationship with God. Revealing how God enters human life to create vitality and embrace us.

Celebrating that God's love unites us and weaves us into one worldwide family that will surely dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

The mother of Jesus is the spokesperson for the people side of this divine-human relationship. She is humanity aware of our lack, aware that we cannot live to the fullest without continual communion with God. "They have no wine," represents our insufficiency. No wine symbolizes a diminishing joy, that our union with God is distorted, our communion with God is falling apart, our communion with each other is damaged. Abundant life fades when our relationships with God and others are strained. One definition for heaven is being in loving relationship with God and all people. Conversely, hell is not being aware of the love of God. Hell is thinking that we will not be in loving relationship with all people. Hell is thinking that love and joy can be lost. Jesus drank wine with the disciples and instructs us to drink wine together to celebrate communion, loving relationship with God and all people. We drink wine to celebrate resurrection. We drink wine as a sacrament, a visible sign of God's redeeming grace offered to all people.

Throughout the gospel of John, Mary's words of need, her desire for transformation are spoken. The royal official, "come, heal my son before he dies." The lame man, "I have no one to put me in the pool." In the face of thousands of hungry people, Philip realizes the disciple's scarcity of money and bread. Even though he has been healed, the blind beggar remembers, "I was blind." Mary and Martha send message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." Account after account of humanity in need. We are unable to live abundantly without God. We cannot clean up the mess we created on our own. We are incapable of perfection, of eternal life without God's help. Our voice joins their voice and Mary's voice, "We have no wine." It is a declaration of our finitude, illness, lameness, blindness, hunger, brokenness, incompleteness, and death. Our condition is so dire we cannot celebrate. We have no wine.

Jesus' response seems unusual. Instead of addressing Mary as mom, or by name, Jesus says, "woman." In a sense, Jesus is echoing Mary's lament of "no wine" agreeing that we as humanity lack abundant life apart from God. Jesus' address of "woman" should remind us of Eve. God enjoyed conversations with Eve and Adam in paradise. Then, Adam and Eve rebelled. Their desire to be in control and make all the decisions resulted in a myriad of sinful choices. All the problems of the world are our fault. Pain, loss, brokenness, division death entered God's good creation by our rebellion, our fear and hate. Woman reminds us that each of us is a sinner, no one is worthy of God's love, no one can earn glorious eternal life.

The angel addressed Mary as, "Mary full of grace." The angel then explained how Jesus will be conceived by the Holy Spirit and become God incarnate, grace in human flesh, to save us from our sins, to provide all that we lack. Woman, Eve, represents our broken, needy, sinful state. Mary represents transformation to abundant life by grace. Jesus' glory is to bring divine abundance into our world of lack. The incarnate love of God prevents perishing. God's grace ensures that the wine always flows in abundance. John summarizes all this in the next chapter. **John 3:16-17 NRSV "For God so loved the world that God gave God's only Son, so that everyone who believes in Jesus may not perish but may have eternal life. "Indeed, God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Jesus."**

In addition to replying "woman," Jesus continues "what concern is that to you and me?" Jesus is clarifying again that all the problems of the world are our fault. We have made a mess too big for us to clean up. It is not God's concern, because there were no defects in God's good creation. God is pure joy, love, peace, creativity, and goodness. The mess we have made of the world does not diminish God in any way, so it is not a concern of God. God does delight in us. God desires to speak and listen to us. God desires to live with us for eternity. A perfect God cannot be in perfect relationship with imperfect humanity so God's grace, free unconditional love, transforms us into glorious perfection. God's grace makes us righteous, holy, capable to be in eternal loving relationship with God and all people. The reason for Jesus coming to earth is to supply wine for the failing marriage of divine and human life. This transformation of water into wine is merely a snippet of divine love embracing humanity, a facet of grace, there will be numerous more snippets in the ministry of Jesus, a facet in Jesus' resurrection. The full revelation will happen in Jesus' "hour" when humanity is fully perfected and united with God and each individual is fully united with all of humanity. This hour has not yet come. This coming hour creates hope.

In the gospel of John, the disciples ask Jesus, "Where do you live?" Jesus lives "close to God's heart." The invitation is to receive God's love, to be one with God and one with one another like Jesus, God and Holy Spirit are one. Jesus' hour is the completion of this reunion. God never forces, never overwhelms. God honors free will. Jesus enters human flesh, to share our suffering, our plight, our lack, in order to comfort, save and fulfill, to quench our thirst for wine. Jesus drank the sour wine on the cross so all of us will enjoy the good wine of the heavenly banquet celebrating God's love that had made all of us, one.

Mary full of grace, glimpsed God's grace and realizes each of us is invited to participate in the salvation of the cosmos. We are to make straight and level the road. We are to help everyone journey home. Therefore, Mary instructs the servants "to do whatever Jesus tells you."

The six stone water jars are for Jewish rites of purification. The water is used to ritually wash the body, the outside in order to make one clean. This Old Testament practice sought to maintain our relationship with God by human effort to remain pure. One must ritually atone for their sins to enjoy a relationship with God and others. Jesus turns this upside down. Jesus atones for our sins. God's grace does all the work. We are washed cleaned by the Holy Spirit, symbolized by baptism. God purifies us. Grace enables everyone to enjoy a relationship with God. Jesus said: **John 4:14 "The water that I will give will become in us a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."** At the wedding, this gushing water becomes wine. Wine is a symbol for the Holy Spirit purifying a person from within. Wine is a symbol for the abundance of grace that continually wells up within us. Wine is a symbol for abundant, joyful, complete life.

John concludes by saying the transformation of water into wine is a sign. A sign consists of the surface, physical, literal level, what one can see, hear, touch, smell, and taste and an immense symbolic level. Today, we have merely scratched the surface of the symbolism of this account of transformation. Scripture is living word meaning that there are always fresh insights for you to discover, savor, and celebrate. And keep in mind that this is merely one account of transformation that only reveals the tiniest morsel of the myriad of transformations Jesus is offering you.

The human tendency is to be like the steward, to stay on the surface, to be oblivious to the magnificent transformations that are happening all around us and within us. Oblivious to the transformation of the water into the good wine the steward continues his tasks. The steward frets that serving good wine after the inferior wine is not the way things are typically done. The fact that the steward is oblivious to the transformation, the grace, the wedding of God and all of humanity does not diminish the glory of the wedding or the celebration.

John shares this as the "first sign." Again John always has multi-layers to every word. It is the first sign in his gospel and first also means it reveals a pattern of God's transforming grace. It is a "first sign" of God's love for us, a love that never gives up on anyone, a love that provides all our needs, a love that will welcome us all home, all love that will lavish every goodness upon us, a joyful love that delights in all humanity being home with God forever.

As you hear again one of John's accounts of transformation, listen for the layers of meaning, ponder the symbolism, imagine how you will be transformed, dream of how the cosmos will be transformed. Imagine everyone celebrating the wedding of God and humanity, all one in love. **John 2:1-11 NRSV "On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. Jesus said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed God's glory; and his disciples believed in Jesus."** The word of the Lord, thanks be to God. Are you celebrating Jesus' transforming grace? Amen\*

\*Portions of this sermon inspired by John Shea